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Interview with Michael P. DiCuirci

March 19, 2018

Speaker 1: Are you ready?

Mike DiCuirci: I'm ready.

Speaker 1: Okay, so Mr. DiCuirci can you tell us the story of how you came to Cedarville?

Mike DiCuirci: It's an interesting story. Happened in 1979. I was a rather new Christian. Came to know the Lord in '75. My wife and I were encouraged by a local pastor at our church to visit Gull Lake Bible Conference up in Hickory Corners, Michigan. It was there that we would get some refreshment and hear more about the Bible. And it was at that particular campgrounds that God really worked in our lives and showed us that we should take another step. And maybe get into full-time Christian service. And I was convinced that I was going to go to Grace Theological Seminary in Indiana. You probably heard of that being a Hoosier.

Speaker 1: Yes.

Mike DiCuirci: And there was a fellow named John Wickham, very great speaker of the Bible who was there. And we were talking to him about maybe going there and teaching and doing some band work and learning to get a divinity degree. Maybe get ordained someday. The other speaker that week was Dr. Paul Dixon. Well, he talked in the morning. Well, he approached my wife and he said, "Does your husband teach music theory?"

Mike DiCuirci: My wife being a great fan of mine said, "Oh, he can teach anything." And she came back to me and I said, "Absolutely not. I'm not interested in teaching music theory whatsoever." And so he approached me in a dining hall a couple days later, this Dr. Dixon from Cedarville. And said, "Can you give me a resume?" And I said, "Oh, I'd be happy to." And I took a table napkin and took a black felt tip pin and wrote a couple of things down and said, "Here you go buddy."

Mike DiCuirci: And he stuck it in his pocket and he said, "Thank you." So about two days later when we got back home, I got a phone call from the department of music and they were looking for a band director and our house sold in a week and we moved down here and the rest is history. Just turned out to be a perfect fit. So I guess you could say, God led me here. I have no question about that.

Speaker 1: That's cool. So what was the name of the camp again how do you say?

Mike DiCuirci: Gull Lake Bible Conference. Hickory Corners, Michigan. Great place to go.

Speaker 1: Sounds lovely. So, what was it about Cedarville that attracted you to it, aside from the convenient timing of it?

Mike DiCuirci: I mean it was obvious this is where I should come. And I just thought it would be great to take what I had been doing. I was a public school band director for eight years. I taught in New York for two and six in Michigan. And had a lot of success with it and when I came to Cedarville, I saw there was some great needs. And developing some ensembles, which we eventually did. Symphonic band, jazz band. We started the Veteran's Day Programs, the Christmas, the showcase. I was all instrumental in that.

Mike DiCuirci: So it was like a blank blackboard and I saw a lot of potential. Not only did God want me here, I believe it was verified that this is where I should be because I had an impact here and I was good and I just loved working with students.

Speaker 1: So how did you end up teaching music?

Mike DiCuirci: Sure, when I was in high school. I went to Ossining High School in New York. I'm actually a New Yorker. A lot of folks think I'm a Michigan guy because I'm an avid Michigan fan and went to school there. But I really came from New York. When I was a junior in high school I had a band director who had a great influence in my life. He was very instrumental, pardon the pun, in helping me make some decisions. And I so much enjoyed playing my instrument. Still do, as a matter of fact.

Mike DiCuirci: It was between going into police work or music. And I decided that time that being a band director is what I wanted to do. So I applied at four or five different schools, looked at the University of Michigan attracted me because it seemed to have a holistic approach to college life. And that's where I ended up going and I did it for 45 years and I still play.

Speaker 1: And so you said you taught eight years in the public school and then you went to the camp and then you were a recent convert, how did you get to become a recent convert after eight years of public school?

Mike DiCuirci: I can give you quite a long story on my testimony. It's been featured on Unshackled, Words to Live By and I used it all over the place. But suffice to say I came from, this is a really brief version, I came from a pretty rough background, Roman Catholic background. Born in New York to an Irish-Italian family. Got hooked on alcohol, the lifestyle that went along with that.

Mike DiCuirci: When I moved to Michigan to take a job there I had had a lot of problems in New York with accidents and owing people money and fights and altercations and I came to meet a girl, who is now my wife for 44 years, and she was very interested in spiritual things and in a new marriage I began to attend Alcoholics Anonymous and in that they introduced me to a spiritual step, that we are hopeless and helpless and we needed to find a higher power.

Mike DiCuirci: That was kind of nebulous to me but God was right on time and brought a singer into my life who was a Christian named Dave Boyer and I heard the gospel through him and shortly after that we were invited to a fundamental Baptist Church where the deal was sealed, so to speak. The pastor led us to Christ, that was in 1975 and I always take the verse, therefore if any man be in Christ, he's a new creation. Old things pass away. Behold all things become new.

Mike DiCuirci: Now, I've left a lot out of that story but I don't want to use all your tape on it.

Speaker 1: Sure. Well, I'm sure a bunch of that is incredible. So after roundabout stuff you came to Cedarville, can you tell us about any relationships that meant a lot to you for the people at Cedarville or the community and any relationship is game, whether it be a faculty, staff, students, townspeople or what have you.

Mike DiCuirci: Well, 37 years at Cedarville met a lot of students that I really connected with and as they matriculated and went out to their careers I remained friends with a lot of former students, which is kind of a neat thing. Of course, there are faculty members that I'm really good friends with. Jim Colman, Chuck Clevenger, Charlie Pagnard, Jim Kragel, people like that. Play a little golf with them, go to movies with them.

Mike DiCuirci: So there's been a lot of good friendships made over the years and then of course my wife and I have vibrated well with some various couples. It was tough. And I'm not going to lie to you that everybody was my best friend or something like that. When you do music and you're changing the culture, so to speak by doing things like, "Hang on Sloopy" with the pep band in 1979, which nobody was used to, you pay a price and you find out who's a fan and who's not.

Mike DiCuirci: But we survived all that.

Speaker 1: Sure and there's some objectionable people in Cedarville that didn't take too kindly to-

Mike DiCuirci: There's probably objectionable people everywhere you go. Having been a minister of music also for 25 years as a part-time job. I've met some of those.

Speaker 1: Now, was there one person in particular that really stands out?

Mike DiCuirci: That was objectionable?

Speaker 1: Yes.

Mike DiCuirci: No.

Speaker 3: How about staff was it close.

Speaker 1: Sure. Let's do that.

Mike DiCuirci: And don't put that objectionable. A close friend of mine?

Speaker 1: Yes.

Mike DiCuirci: Well a lot of my close friends they've come here and they've gone to other places. Which I've always lost some good friends to moving and stuff. There was Dick Torrans, who together we wrote the school fight song. And I understand Jim Kragel's moving on after this year and sorry to see that. And some of my friends have retired already.

Mike DiCuirci: I suppose one of the great friends I had was Jim Colman. We did a ministry together called Brass and Ivory where we would go out and play music with the horns that I play, trombone and baritone and he played piano and we had a great time. His personality and mine were so different than each other that we put a nice program together. Yeah, I missed him the most when he left but I've had a lot of good friends at Cedarville.

Speaker 1: That's good. So are there any particular moments or experiences from Cedarville that help define what Cedarville means to you?

Mike DiCuirci: Yes. I'll go fast because there's a lot of them. Bringing the pep band to fruition was fun. We ended up with 150 piece pep band at one time. I've got the photos to prove that. And I did that for 23 years and ended up going into the Athletic Hall of Fame, which I get a big kick out of. When I tell people I was in the Athletic Hall of Fame. They say, "For what?" And I'll kid them and say shot put or something like that.

Mike DiCuirci: But it was because of the pep band and of course in 1987 we celebrated the 100th year of the school. And that was a lot of great programming. We had concerts and all that and there was Dr. Dixon's farewell, which was a great concert that I was able to organize. I suppose putting the Veteran's Day program together was a lot of fun.

Mike DiCuirci: Way back in '79 they had a pretty weak Veteran's Program and you can print that one. And I objected to it and the fellow in charge said, "Well, if you don't like it, do something better." Well, I took it over and we ended up doing a pretty good program for a long time with that and there was showcase that we started that was a highlight. Where we brought in kids from choirs and orchestras and bands and put together honors groups.

Mike DiCuirci: I suppose the Bruce Wilkinson meetings that I had the honor of leading songs in chapel for a long time. I was kind of like Dr. Dixon's Minister of Music and I led all the worship and we had hundreds of kids stepping forward to do mission work, which was really something. And then there was a song that got identified

with me years ago that I introduced to the student body and we sang it to death. It was called, "The Lion of Judah."

Speaker 1: Ah yes.

Mike DiCuirci: And we did that for years. So there's been some great moments.

Speaker 1: That's really incredible, are there any events or moments in your time at Cedarville that have helped shaped you into the person that you are today?

Mike DiCuirci: Well I suppose if I had to come up with a list of five people that influenced me the most in my life, I think Dr. Paul Dixon would be on that list. I really responded well to his leadership so that was a highlight of my years there. I thought he was the quintessential choleric leader who made up his mind quickly and did a lot of good things for the school. So I got along really good with him.

Mike DiCuirci: Other events that shaped me. I suppose understanding fully what an impact we could have as teachers, as I've seen students graduate and go into careers that are really noteworthy. Band directors you know and choir teachers and ministers of music. That was been a highlight as well. And then truly feeling like whatever gifts God has given me were able to be used here. Which was definitely a highlight.

Speaker 1: That's really cool. Anything else campus wide or something else that wouldn't necessarily have affected anyone else that kind of stands out to you?

Mike DiCuirci: Something that stands out to me that affected me?

Speaker 1: Yes.

Mike DiCuirci: My fat paycheck.

Speaker 1: I've got one. How about this, you said you wrote that resume on a napkin. What came of that?

Mike DiCuirci: The actual napkin itself?

Speaker 1: Well no, I mean he took that back.

Mike DiCuirci: He took that back-

Speaker 1: And you got an interview off a napkin.

Mike DiCuirci: Oh yeah, apparently. I don't even remember what I wrote on it. It wasn't much. It was where I graduated from, what I did and I believe he passed it on to the chairman of the music department who was looking for someone who did not play trumpet and had public school experience. It was August now, so you see

they were, I think they were kind of desperate to find somebody to start the school here.

Mike DiCuirci: Because they had Charlie Pagnard here that played trumpet really well and I had public school experience and was a trombone player. So they gave me an interview and it worked out very nicely and put our house on the market and it sold in, we asked that God would sell it in one week and with 15 minutes to spare, it sold.

Mike DiCuirci: And when we came here looking for a house, I saw a car with a Century 21 magnetic sign on it. Of course, this town is small and I knocked on the door and nobody answered. I opened the door. I said, "Is there a real estate guy in here?" And guy said, "Yeah, it's me." And he showed us the house that we bought.

Speaker 3: Wow.

Speaker 1: Fantastic.

Mike DiCuirci: I've never filled out a resume for any job my whole life. I just bounce along whatever God's got next, that's fine.

Speaker 1: That's incredible.

Mike DiCuirci: You gonna offer me a job?

Speaker 1: There's a volunteer position.

Mike DiCuirci: I get plenty of those.

Speaker 3: Well, thank you Mike,

Mike DiCuirci: You're welcome.